

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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**1. Name of Property**

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historic name: Kenyon's Department Store

other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

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**2. Location**

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street & number: 344 Main Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: South Kingstown vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Washington code: 009 zip code: 02879

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**3. Classification**

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Ownership of Property: Private

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Kenyon's Department Store, Washington County, RI

**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Frederick Williamson  
Signature of certifying official

30 Sep 1992  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ entered in the National Register	___	___
___ See continuation sheet.	___	___
___ determined eligible for the National Register	___	___
___ See continuation sheet.	___	___
___ determined not eligible for the National Register	___	___
___ removed from the National Register	___	___
___ other (explain):	___	___
___	___	___
	Signature of Keeper	Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic:	<u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>	Sub:	<u>department store</u>
Current:	<u>COMMERCE/TRADE</u>	Sub:	<u>department store</u>

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**7. Description**

Architectural Classification:

Queen Anne  
Commercial Style

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation CONCRETE roof ASPHALT  
walls WOOD other BRICK  
Shingle

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

X See continuation sheet.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A & C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE  
COMMERCE

Period(s) of Significance: 1891-1942

Significant Dates: 1891 1899 1924

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Chase, Charles  
Lewis, Harry A.

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>291150</u>	<u>4590190</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description:  See continuation sheet.

The nominated property is coextensive with Assessor's Plat 57-4, lot 200, as defined by the Town of South Kingstown.

Boundary Justification:  See continuation sheet.

The boundary encompasses the lot on which the historic resource is located.

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Robert Owen Jones, Senior Historic Preservation Specialist

Organization: R.I. Historical Preservation Commission Date: June 1992

Street & Number: 150 Benefit Street Telephone: 401-277-2678

City or Town: Providence State: RI ZIP: 02903

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### Description

Kenyon's Department Store is an unusually well preserved late nineteenth-century, two-and-one-half-story, wood-frame Queen Anne commercial block half embedded in one-story, early twentieth-century additions, among them a distinctive Commercial Style shopfront. The building stands on a corner lot bounded by Main Street on the northwest and Kenyon Avenue on the southwest. It is set right at the sidewalk edge on the Main Street frontage, with a parking lot on the northeast side and a paved driveway at the rear (southeast side). Kenyon Avenue angles away from the building toward the southeast, leaving space for a small patch of grass lawn toward the rear of the building. The immediate setting of Kenyon's is a typical small-town commercial street with a mix of detached and abutting one-, two-, and three-story commercial buildings interspersed with institutional structures and dwellings.

Visually the building comprises three distinct sections: a two-and-one-half-story block, a one-story addition on the original block's northeast side, and a one-story storefront across the Main Street (northwesterly) end of both these units.

The original part, constructed in 1891 and enlarged at the rear in 1899, is a shingled wood-frame rectangular block set with a narrow end facing Main Street and its southwest flank along Kenyon Avenue. Near the middle of the Kenyon Avenue facade a broad, relatively shallow ell breaks forward from the main block, with a tiny shed-roofed, shingled housing for mechanical systems nestled in its northwesterly angle. The additions now mask the first story on the northwest and northeast; only the upper floor and roof are visible from these sides, while the whole block can be seen on the southwest side and rear (southeast). The shingle cladding of the main block and ell is laid with a flaring break between first- and second-story levels. The main block is covered with a gable-on-hip roof with a prominent front gable breaking up through the eaves on the Main Street facade. Corner brackets and projecting jigsawed rafter ends ornament the overhanging eaves. The peak of the front gable is filled with paneling supported by a pair of brackets surmounting a triple window centered in the second-story facade. The small gables topping the hip roof at the front and rear contain elliptical fanlights. The complexly massed ell consists of two subsections. The southeasterly portion is covered by an extension of the main block's roof slope forming a shed roof, which is broken by an end gable containing a paired window and paneling in the gable peak identical to that in the front gable. A chimney rises from the roof near this gable. The northwesterly portion of the ell rises two and one-half-stories and is topped with a jerkin-head roof. This section has a

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subsidiary entrance at the base, comprising a double-leaf wood and plate-glass door with a plate glass transom above, and a triple window at second-story level. Other fenestration on this facade is irregular, consisting of windows arranged singly, in pairs, and in groups of four, the last-named forming ribbon-like bands set high up in the wall. Most windows contain double-hung two-over-two sash; some have one-over-one sash, and one pair, left of the ell, consists of square, fixed-sash windows with large central panes surrounded by narrow border panes of clear glass. On the rear of the main block, there are two pairs of windows on the first story, evenly spaced, set high up, and a single triple window centered above on the second story. The northeasterly side of the second story, visible above the addition, has a single window, one double window, and one triple window. The double and triple windows have fixed sash with large central panes surrounded by narrow border panes, identical to the windows on the southwest side described above.

Attached to the northeasterly side of the main block is a one-story shingled wood-frame addition built in 1924. It is covered with a very low-pitched flat roof. The two-bay rear (southeast) elevation contains an entranceway in the bay adjoining the main block and a double window in the other bay, set high up in the wall. The entrance has a double-leaf wood-frame and plate-glass door surmounted by a two-light transom. On the northeast elevation are four triple windows, set high up and evenly spaced, with four sets of triple windows below them lighting the basement.

Fronting both the addition and the original block is a handsome one-story, three-bay, wood, brick, and plate-glass storefront which projects forward a few feet from the front wall plane of the original block and wraps back one bay deep on the northeasterly and southwesterly sides of the building. Constructed in 1924 along with the northeast addition, the storefront is a typical early twentieth-century shopfront composed of trabeated units forming a regular rectilinear grid pattern. The base of the storefront section is constructed of brick, broken by six basement windows covered with metal grills. Fluted wood pilasters, broken by a continuous molded horizontal band and topped with simple caps, define the three front bays and each side bay. Above the pilasters is a fascia edged with modillions and a projecting boxed cornice. Above the cornice is a paneled wood parapet with plinth-like units that project forward slightly over the pilasters, continuing their vertical line. The center panel of the parapet, raised slightly and with a shallow peaked top, contains the name "KENYON'S" in gilded block lettering. The bays defined by the pilasters are filled almost entirely with glass. The molded horizontal band breaking across the pilasters separates plate-glass display windows from transoms composed of many small squares of translucent frosted glass.

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The central bay on the front contains a slightly recessed main entrance flanked by narrow display window sections. The entrance is a double-leaf wood-frame and plate-glass door framed by plate-glass sidelights and a two-light transom. In front of each bay on each side of the entrance bay are park benches.

The main entrance opens into a small vestibule with steps leading up to another set of double wood and plate-glass doors framed by sidelights and a transom. Most of the interior is a single open space with three rows of regularly spaced, slender Tuscan columns supporting three beams running the length of the building. The floor is wood; the ceiling and beams are covered with pressed metal which has thin strips forming an overall grid pattern. Mid-twentieth century, open fluorescent strip light fixtures with metal reflecting fins hang from the ceiling on metal rods. A plain staircase centrally placed near the front of the store leads down to the basement. On the southwest side, in the ell, are a vestibule connecting to the southwest entrance, the main staircase leading down to the basement and up to the second floor, and a small hall connecting to an employee's room on the right and a restroom on the left. The main staircase has turned newel posts at the bottom. At the rear, a row of small fitting booths partially closes off an office in the original part of the structure, while the back of the addition contains a large vestibule connecting with the southeast entrance. A few more fitting booths are located at the front of the store, northeast of the main entrance. The store is outfitted with fixtures from a variety of periods, including many display cases and wood desks manufactured expressly for Kenyon's by the Grand Rapids Furniture Company in 1891.

The basement is also mostly open, with three rows of regularly spaced columns supporting the beams that carry the first floor above. Unenclosed fluorescent strip fixtures are attached directly to the ceiling, which is covered with pressed metal. Some fitting booths are located in the northerly front corner. The southerly rear corner and the ell space, except for the main staircase, are partitioned off as a furnace room and storage areas.

The second floor is a single open space except for the main staircase and an employee's room partitioned off in the ell. The pressed-metal-clad ceiling is edged by the slopes of the hip roof, creating a coved or vaulted effect. Unenclosed fluorescent strip fixtures are attached directly to the ceiling.

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Despite the few modern elements in the store, such as the fluorescent light fixtures and some clothes racks and display cases, Kenyon's very much conveys the feeling and association of being from a bygone era.

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Significance

Kenyon's Department Store is significant as a well preserved example of period commercial architecture reflecting broad patterns of history. The building embodies the distinctive characteristics of two particular types and styles of architecture, and in its present form reflects both the growth of the firm and the evolution of commercial business practices over time. Kenyon's development parallels the emergence of the village of Wakefield as South Kingstown's primary commercial, institutional, and civic center during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The store's survival as a physical artifact, in relatively intact form, is remarkable for a building type often subject to disfiguring modernizations or demolition, and its survival as an establishment is equally remarkable in an age when such small-town Main Street commercial enterprises continually go out of business in the face of competition from modern shopping centers and malls. Its longevity and the manner in which its business is carried on make Kenyon's a cornerstone of the community socially as well as economically. These associations make Kenyon's significant under National Register criteria A and C.

The founder of Kenyon's, William G. Kenyon, began his business career in 1855, when he sold his farmstead at Point Judith, moved to Wakefield, and started the firm Kenyon & Barber, dealers in farm supplies. Kenyon left that company in 1866 and two years later opened a dry goods store in a building at 396 Main Street, which he operated up to his death in 1877.

William's son Orrin P. Kenyon took over the store and ran it until his death in 1932. Orrin's brother William A. Kenyon joined him in the business for six years, from 1881 until he died in 1887. In 1888 Orrin hired Providence engineer Charles Chase to design a new building--the original part of the present store--which was completed in 1891. The building that Chase designed was renovated slightly in 1899. In 1923 the business was incorporated under the name O. P. Kenyon Company, Inc. A year later Orrin hired Providence architect Harry A. Lewis to design additions and alterations to the store. Original drawings show that the additions were to be larger and more elaborate than what was finally built, including a five-bay granite, brick, and glass storefront instead of the present three-bay brick, wood, and glass one.

After Orrin's death his son Grafton Kenyon took over the business. Grafton's son-in-law James P. Caffrey ran the store from the 1940s to the 1980s. Kenyon's is now owned and operated by Caffrey's daughter Carol Kenyon Hazlehurst.

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The store's success is closely tied to the development of Wakefield. This settlement originated in the first half of the eighteenth century as a rural hamlet with grist and saw mills and a stage-stop tavern. About 1807 the first factory was built here, and the village began to develop as a textile manufacturing center. Growth was slow but steady as churches, schools, a bank, a post office, stores, and other facilities were established to serve an expanding population. Major new mill construction took place in 1850 and 1867. The years following the Civil War brought greater prosperity and accelerated growth. A railroad branch line running from the Providence-New York main route to Narragansett Pier opened in 1876, the Town Hall was located in the village in 1877, and by 1895 Wakefield had become the most populous section of South Kingstown. During this period Wakefield emerged as the town's principal business, institutional, and civic center. In this context, between 1855 and 1877, William G. Kenyon made his store a commercial success, becoming one of the town's most prominent merchants. As an adjunct to his career in trade, he took an active role in the development of Wakefield, purchasing a large tract in the village which he subdivided, platting out streets and lots for new construction. William Kenyon passed this legacy to his son Orrin, whose continued success is reflected in the store building constructed in 1891 and enlarged in 1924.

Architecturally Kenyon's store is interesting for its amalgamation of distinctive parts, each characteristic in type, style, and image of the commercial architecture of the period during which it was constructed. In the original block of 1891, form and style combine to create an imposing presence. The multi-story form is typical of the period, when commercial blocks in even the smallest towns strove for an urban image through increased height (even to the point of erecting tall false fronts on single-story buildings), and the utilization of elements of the Queen Anne style, which by nature favors ornamental elaboration and variety, are here employed to good effect on a building type the very essence of which is to be eye-catching. The building's distinctive gable-on-hip roof form, bracketed cornice, prominent bracketed and paneled front gable, and top gables with fanlight windows are still visually commanding features in spite of the dominance of the later storefront. The wood construction of the original block also distinguishes it. Multi-story wooden blocks of this scale are rare in Rhode Island, and the Queen Anne stylistic treatment of Kenyon's original block make it especially rare, if not unique. In contrast, the addition of 1924, particularly the storefront, illustrates a different approach to style and program. The image is not that of the aggressively vertical city commercial block but the low, horizontal line of the one-part block as exemplified by the so-called "taxpayer" buildings that collectively form the commercial strips which sprang up along trolley

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lines and primary automobile arteries during the early twentieth century. The storefront is pushed up close to the sidewalk, with huge windows for the conspicuous display of merchandise, and a pediment-like panel above to be emblazoned with the firm name in bold letters. Kenyon's illustrates successive trends in the developmental history of this particular firm and others of the same type. Started as a dry-goods establishment, Kenyon's gradually evolved into a department store as a wider variety of merchandise came to be marketed and as classes or types of goods were segregated into particular parts of the store. The store followed the form favored for the department store in the late nineteenth century: a multi-level layout on floors stacked in a multi-story building. The emerging preference for single-story store layouts, culminating in today's sprawling one-story department stores, particularly those selling low-cost or discount merchandise, shows in the design of the 1924 addition to Kenyon's. The addition reflects the general prosperity of the 1920s and that decade's obsession with modernity.

In addition to the significance of its architectural character and its ability to illustrate successive phases of commercial historical development, reference should be made to the considerable associative value that has accrued to Kenyon's through its long-standing, ongoing role and position in community life, making it a socio-cultural as well as an architectural and historical landmark. The sense of continuity, stability, and tradition that it has come to represent is a source of pride not only for the family that has operated the store for five generations, but for many residents of Wakefield, many of whom have great affection for its old-fashioned quality. As a family-owned business staffed by employees who have close interpersonal relationships with the majority of the customers, the store functions as a social center as well as a commercial establishment. The very personal nature of the manner in which business has been and continues to be conducted has given rise to innumerable lovingly retold nostalgic anecdotes about Kenyon's which are an integral part of the town's collective consciousness. That this sense of feeling and association has survived in the face of massive suburbanization of and population growth in surrounding areas of South Kingstown during the past thirty years is a testament to Kenyon's very special status.

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### Major Bibliographical References

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Liebs, Chester H. Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture. Boston, Toronto, and London, 1985.

Longstreth, Richard. The Buildings of Main Street: A Guide to American Commercial Architecture. [Washington], 1987.

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Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission. Historic and Architectural Resources of South Kingstown, Rhode Island: A Preliminary Report, by Walter A. Nebiker. Providence, 1984.

Zurro, Deborah. Draft for National Register nomination for Kenyon's Department Store. 1991. On file at RIHPC.

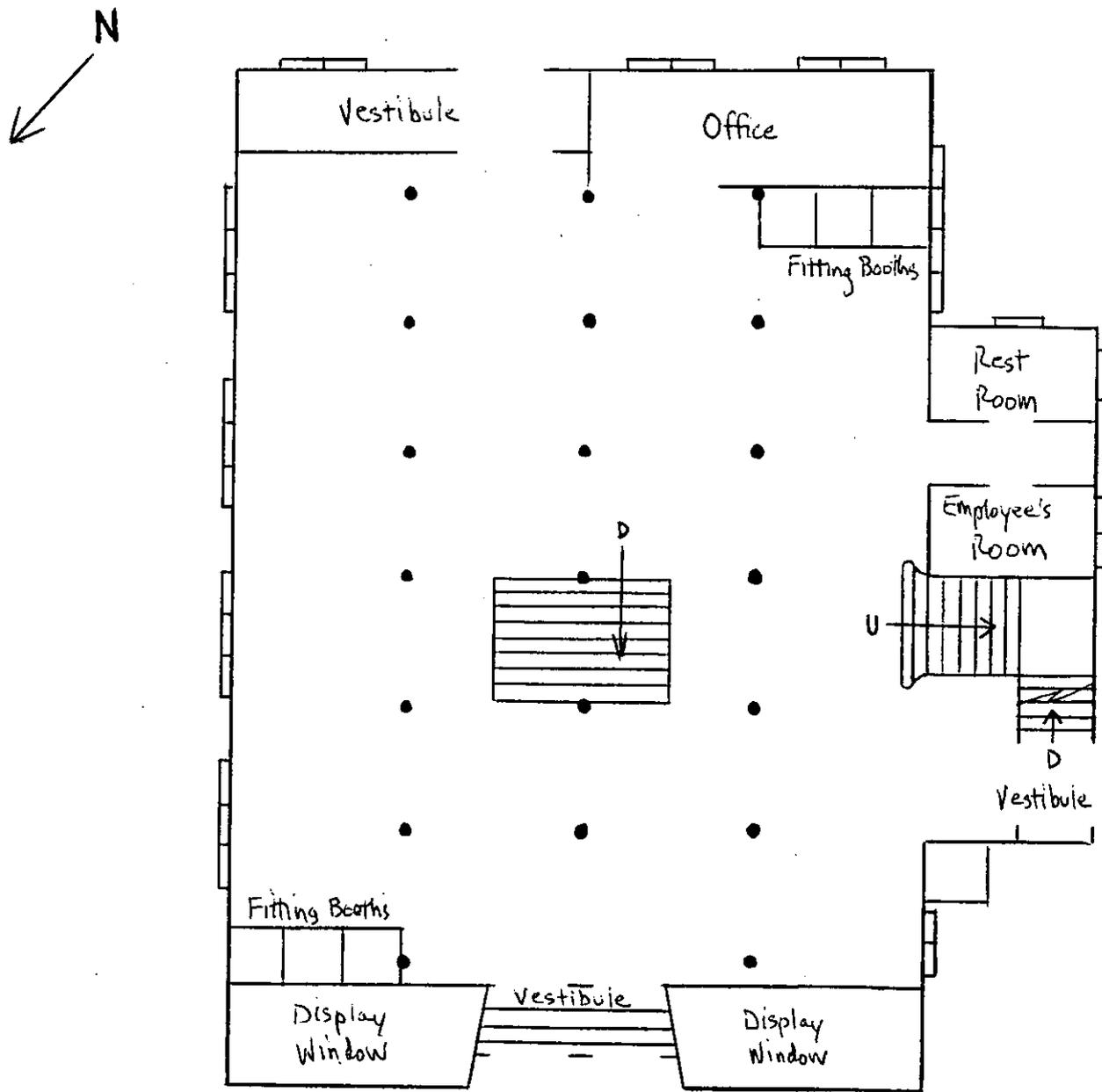
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Sketch Plan - Not to scale

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### Photographs

Kenyon's Department Store  
344 Main Street  
Washington County  
South Kingstown, Rhode Island

Photographer: Deborah Zurro

Date: August, 1991

Location of Negatives: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission,  
150 Benefit Street, Providence, Rhode Island 02903

[Above information applies to all photographs]

1. Exterior view facing southerly.
2. Interior view of first floor facing easterly.
3. Interior view of first floor facing southwesterly, showing main staircase.
4. Interior view of basement facing southerly.
5. Interior view of second floor facing westerly, showing top of staircase.



KENYON'S.

Kenyon's Department Store  
344 Main Street  
(Washington County)  
South Kingstown, R.I.



Kenny's Department Store  
344 Main Street  
(Washington County)  
South Kingstown, R. I.

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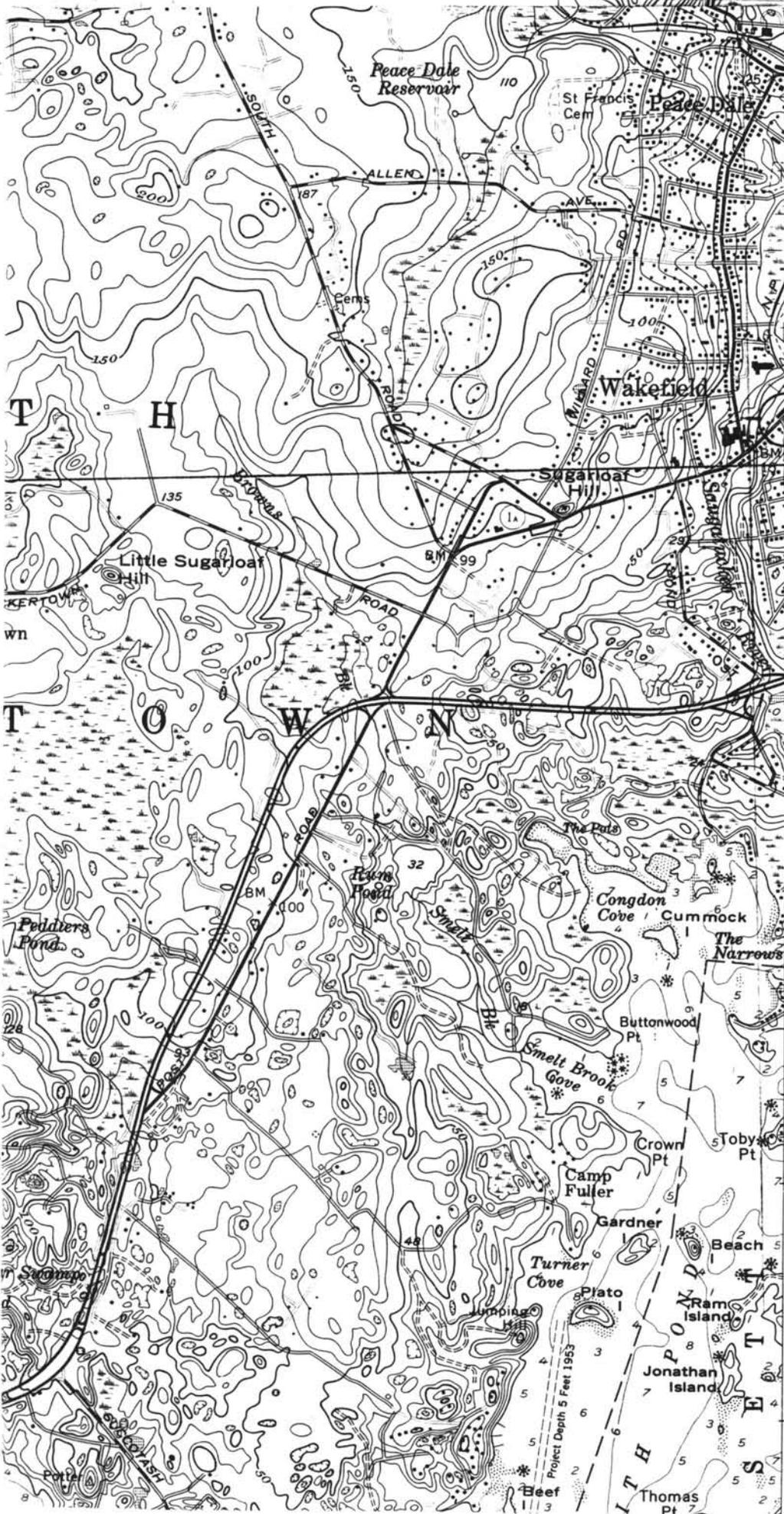
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